

Ad Hoc Bedford Museum Study Committee Minutes of December 16, 2014

Attending: members, Gaye Carpenter, Angelo Colao, Kara Kerwin, Selectmen William Moonan, chair, and Mike Rosenberg, Christopher Weisz and Francis Gicca, Bedford Historical Society representative. Also present was Jan van Steenwijk of the Historical Society. The minutes of the November 18 meeting were approved by a vote of 4-0-2.

Members viewed a spreadsheet comparing 16 local museums in many categories. Bill said the report should meet the selectmen's request for information on other towns. He noted that almost all are centrally located, about two-thirds are town-owned, most have municipal financial support and half were donated buildings. Almost all are managed by a historical society or historical commission. Frank said the committee hasn't been considering an annual town contribution. Bill replied that in some cases the towns pay for the museums' utilities.

The spreadsheet doesn't include a category for the success of the museum. The Bedford Historical Society's vision for success is a building owned by the town and operated by the society, with meeting space open to other groups. Chris said comparative financial data are indicative of level of success, and the key variables are attendance and members. Angelo said an addition to the police station would cover all of the building issues and allow for multiple displays, which would encourage a younger generation. Chris added that if the museum sponsors events in the schools, students will be ambassadors to their parents. Frank noted that volunteers are a key to success so the facility needs to be easily accessible. Jan noted that the society's membership is older.

Kara said the museum should represent "the story of Bedford." She added that high school students seeking community service credits can be a source of museum help. Chris said exhibits like the history of Bedford high School would interest young people. He also volunteered to prepare an updated summary of museums in area towns. Mike commented that information on the current spreadsheet suggests limited capacity and finance are tied to a museum's success.

Bill said he would like the committee to focus on evaluating the local possibilities on the site list, and there may be additional prospects. Perhaps the list should be ranked, he said. Bill said he plans to prepare a ranking sheet. The town has a great opportunity to avoid what others have done wrong, Frank said, adding that a historic house serves primarily as a residence. Angelo said the committee should examine all components required for a museum.

Mike suggested that it might be less expensive to build from scratch than to renovate an existing facility. Frank pointed out that new construction precludes the use of Community preservation funding or historic grants. He added that the existing infrastructure is a feature of the Town Hall multi-purpose room.